

### *Topography of a Tongue*

I stick out my 10-centimeter 60-gram movable mass second-grader style and flinch: Robitussin cherry cough syrup color and cracked. Back when I wore pigtails and bows, I screeched *gross!* at the sight of my mother inspecting her own tongue. She shrugged, said *skedaddle*. Now middle-aged, mine, too, resembles volcanic rock. A long, indented line snakes down its center with smaller ones angling off to the sides like complex sentence diagrams. When I ask my husband to peek, he shrieks *ew!* though he has lovingly lickkissed that tissue for twenty-eight years. Lights out, I stew about my tingling organ. Is it normal? Last year, my far-from-normal writing student who never held back from telling her truth died of tongue cancer. At the dentist, I open wide. She prods, proclaims *aha, a geography tongue!* Exotic images flash: mountains and oceans, world maps, spinning globes. In bed, it calls me Atlas: *do you hold up the heavens with grace or bear its burden?*

